

TEACHING PLAN FOR JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

— An Experimental English Lesson Employing New Methodologies —

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Introduction

“Why do I have to learn English ? I’m sure I’ll never use it for the rest of my life !” How many times did I hear my students lament like this ? I had almost been fed up with this by the time I quit my former job, teaching English to high school students in 1990. My poor students who had been studying English for more than five years and could scarcely compose a simple sentence using present tense were always complaining how English classes were boring and how they had been suffering from them. I, as a teacher, had to convince them that English was the most widely spoken language in the world and that they should study it otherwise they would be very likely to feel inconvenienced in their life. Every time I told them this I felt kind of guilty because I knew how dry and tasteless English classes were.

According to the Guideline of foreign language teaching submitted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, all the students who attend junior and senior high schools are to be taught English at least three hours a week. But there are so many students who have wasted time for nothing, it seems painful for students to learn English through the Grammar Translation method. When I was teaching at a second rate girl’s high school in Japan, I tried so hard to create an interesting learning environment. I used as much realia as I could imagine such as picture post cards of the Metropolitan Museum, empty containers of imported shampoos, tea, or coffee, coins which I was given by a friend of mine etc. Using these exotic materials I expected my students to open their eyes and start to study English as a tool to know about the world instead of knitting in a classroom. (It’s so embarrassing to know that my classes are so boring that students prefer knitting to learning!) But most of my trials ended in failure. One big reason was that my way did not appeal to the school administrators. They blames me for bringing those “toys” into the classroom. Another crucial reason was that the students themselves neither wanted to study English nor had any need to learn it. In Japan, the biggest element which impels students to study English is the university entrance examinations. They study English because English grammar is one of the most decisive factors of the examination. My students were all allowed to enter a girl’s junior college with which the high school was affiliated. It meant they did not have to study at all. How could I motivate students who did not need to study? I used to wonder why they did not take advantage of their privilege. I cannot but say that this is a fundamental defect of the Japanese education in the English language.

Now I have to spare lines to describe the grammar translation method to which I attribute part of the failure in our English education system.

The grammar translation method was devised and developed for use in secondary schools. Howatt (1984) argues that the grammar translation method could be called the grammar school method since its strengths, weaknesses, and excesses reflected the requirements, aspirations, and ambitions of the nineteenth-century grammar school in its various guises in different countries.

The grammar translation method began in Germany at the end of eighteenth-century and established a position as the most favored methodology of the Prussian Gymnasien. the traditional scholastic approach among individual learners in the eighteenth century had been to acquire a reading knowledge of foreign languages by studying a grammar and applying this knowledge to the interpretation of texts with the use of a dictionary.

However, scholastic methods of this kind were not well-suited to capabilities of younger school pupils and, moreover, they were self-study methods which were inappropriate for group-teaching in classrooms.

The grammar translation method was an attempt to adapt these traditions to the circumstances and requirements of schools. It preserved the basic framework of grammar and translation because these were already familiar both to teachers and pupils from their classical studies.

Japan adapted the grammar translation method for similar reasons. During the Edo era, people learned how to read Chinese with a method which was very close to grammar translation. When Japan realized that it was time to begin a campaign of internationalization through the teaching of English, the grammar translation method was chosen because people were familiar with the method.

Long after European countries and the United States gave up the grammar translation for its reported lack of facility in teaching speech, Japan continued to adhere to this particular method. One of reasons Japan did not give up the grammar translation method is that most EFL teachers were not native speakers of the target language and so naturally, there is a tendency to rely on grammar translation. As Larsen-Freeman (1986) asserts, students' native language plays an important role in the selection of this method. A country such as Japan, which is surrounded by ocean, is rather insulated from the rest of the world and historically has had difficulty recruiting native English teachers. (now this is not true any more, but we are facing new problems that native English teachers are prone to have difficulty dealing with errors Japanese students repeatedly make because they do not know Japanese grammar.)

Another reason is that grammar translation makes evaluation of students' achievement relatively easy. Written tests in which students are asked to translate from their native language to the target language or vice versa are frequently used. Translation makes evaluation more fair and more objective.

Here is another merit of grammar translation method. The grammar approach can help students to learn how to spell correctly because this approach requires students to: 1) write the same words repetitively and 2) read the same words repetitively. (The constant repetition of reading or writing words creates deeply impressed mental images which helps students recall the

correct spelling of words.) On the surface, westerners may judge repetitive drill practice as a weakness and not a strength, based of western standards and norms. However, many Japanese students feel at ease with highly structured drill practice which yield predictable results.

As I described so far the grammar translation method has been fit for many aspects of not only our education system (historical and conventional), but also students' needs. Then I think what we have to do right now is to reconsider whether all the students, motivated or unmotivated, have to follow the MOE guideline. However it is impossible for me to call up a meeting to talk about the issue.

These days opinions that students should be taught “communicative English” is growing. And the Ministry of Education is changing its tone to encourage teachers to teach that. Let me put aside my question that what communicative English really is and hypothesis that communicative English means English which is used in communication. But then do we Japanese practically need what is called communicative English in our daily life in which that should be mostly used? My answer to the question is NO. Living in small islands, we do not need to learn a foreign language like immigrants who desperately need language to acclimate themselves to their new countries. Consequently, the biggest task to which teachers are relegated is not to teach effectively but to motivate students.

I remember the first day in Thailand where I spent my summer vacation last year. I, as an innocent tourist from the richest country in Asia who had been told that I could buy anything with money there, realized that I was from totally westernized country in terms of language. They did not understand English at all except a few hotel employees and scholars. Once I admired the history of Thailand which had never experienced western colonialism by continuous effort of smart kings, but when I could not make myself clearly understood neither in English nor in German only to take a cab at a midnight airport I cursed their education system.

Though in Japan each individual is not always highly motivated in learning English, we should teach them or help them learn English to some extent at this point of time when we are likely to meet people from various countries and with various backgrounds. English can be the solution to solve communication conflicts between us.

Now we should start our project to motivate and convince students to the study of English which will enable them to adjust the complexities of the world.

My Beliefs on Language Teaching

1 Language learning should be fun

Students learn a lot when they are having fun. Also, it is necessary that students are relaxed and feel secure in a classroom. Curran (1983) says that the nonthreatening counseling relationship provides the most optimal environment for learning. In this lesson plan, I combine many physical activities so that students can have fun and can also ask a teacher questions. According to my experience, students feel relieved and open their mind more when they are moving rather than just sitting at their desks.

2 Language is for communication

“Language must be spoken. But in a traditional class, each students can speak no more than four times during the period.” Though I do not deny the importance of fostering competence of reading and writing in English, I agree with Rassias (1968). “That’s like learning mathematics with our examples,” he continues. Here is a good example of learning language without speaking. It is thousands of Japanese adults who have learned English for good many years and cannot hold any confidence in speaking in it. Though I do not think that only the grammar translation method by which they learned English accounts for their awfully poor ability in speaking it, I would have to say that they, including me, could have improved their English much more by learning it through methods other than the grammar translation. I was moved when I read about Rassias’s experience as a marine stationed in post war Japan. “I found that –unable to speak Japanese – I wandered the country like a phantom, cut off from the people, baffled by their culture. And suddenly my fascination with languages rekindled.”

3 Silent period is important

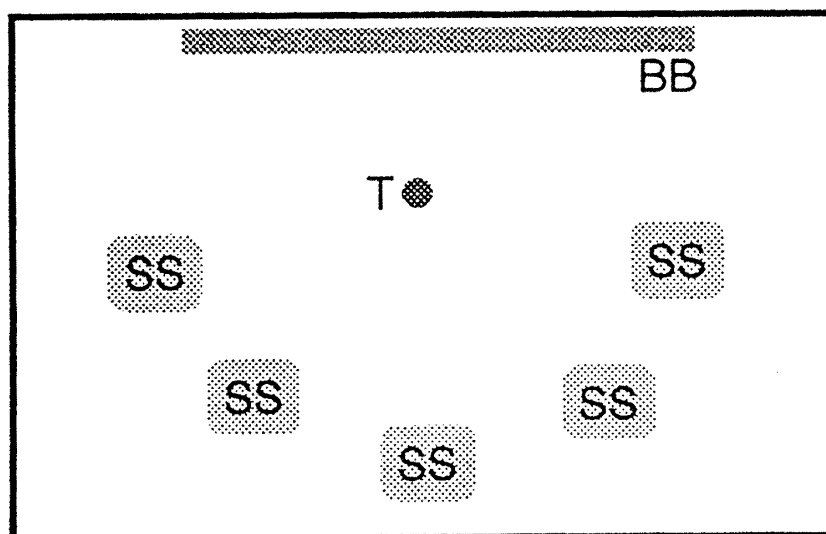
To improve communication skills, I believe that the listening skill should be trained in the early stages of learning. In this lesson plan, I used Total Physical Response by which I think students develop their listening comprehension skill. Babies spend long time only listening to other people’s voice before they start speaking, and by the time they can produce meaningful words they already understand relatively complicated contents of adults’ conversation going on around them. Linguists call this listening period the “silent period.” In TPR classroom students are not required to utter a word during the first stage of lessons. They are told to concentrate on listening to imperatives made by a teacher. They are only to react them by assuming the meaning of those imperatives observing how their teacher himself react to the imperatives. Drothee Palmer (1970) says that physically responding to verbal stimulus is one of the simplest and most primitive forms of stimulus and reaction in the whole range of speech-activities.

Unlike conventional teaching pattern that encourage students immediate switch from listening to production, I planned to give students enough silent period.

Lesson Plan A

This lesson plan is made for thirty-five Japanese high school students studying in a regular high school in which most students are going to go to universities. Therefore almost all English classes are naturally geared into university entrance examinations. So this would be one extra class meeting once a week, whose purpose is to make them realize how interesting to learn English is and eventually to motivate them in a long span to keep on making effort to study communicative English after they get into colleges. This plan can be adopted to any arbitrary class period in the second month of the four months of one semester. In this particular lesson students are not yet expected to speak.

If the number of students in one class is more than forty, it will be recommended that all the



desks are moved away from classroom so that you can walk freely among students. In this figure, SS refers to students, BB blackboard, the circle in the middle of the class is a teacher.

ACTIVITY	TEACHER'S ROLE	STUDENTS' ROLE	TIME
1 Greeting	Greet the entire class then selectively greet individual students	Greet the teacher in chorus then certain students greet the teacher	0 3
2 Answering questions with cards (material #1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Distribute cards * Ask students questions (material #2) * collect the cards 	* Answer the question using the cards	4 13
3 TPR (total physical response) (material #3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Give commands to volunteers * Do this activity with the volunteers 	* Look at the teacher and the volunteers	14 19
4 TPR	* Give commands to the entire class	* Follow the commands	20 30
5 TPR	* Demonstrate how to follow another commands (material #4)	* Look at the teacher	31 36
6 TPR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Operate the tape recorder * Observe the class 	* Act according to the tape-recorded commands	36 41

7	TPR	* Operate the tape recorder * Observe the class	* Act according to the tape-recorded commands (this time not in regular sequence)	41 46
8	TPR	* Give the same commands orally	* Act according to the command	46 51
9	Dictation (material #5)	* Read key sentences in today's lesson	* Return to seats * Dictate the key words	52 57
10	Check	* Write answer keys on a blackboard	* Take notes	57 60

Lesson Plan B

ACTIVITY	TEACHER'S ROLE	STUDENTS' ROLE	TIME
1 Greeting	Greet the entire class then selectively greet individual students	Greet the teacher in chorus then certain students greet the teacher	0
2 "Looking Into a Mirror" game	Pair up all the students then explain about the game (material #6)	Move desks and chairs away so that they can get an open space	5
3 LIM game	Walk among the students to give them suitable advice	Look at their partners carefully and act exactly same as them	8
4 LIM game	Pick up one student who has been doing nicely and have him/her do the game with the teacher	One who is chosen to demonstrate performs the LIM with the teacher Others look at them	13
5 LIM game	Make sure if students understand what they are doing	Listen to the teacher's explanation	18
6 LIM game	Tell students to switch partners and continue to play on the game	Make effort to find new partners for further practice	25
7 LIM follow up	Indicate students to move desks and chairs back to their place	Set desks and chairs back and resume seats	33
8 LIM follow up	Tell students to write down sentences they tried during the game	Write their sentences down on their own notebooks	38

9 LIM follow up	Explain basic grammar points (esp. present perfect)	Listen to the teacher	45
10 Check	Ask some questions referring to students' sentences in order to reinforce important points	Answer the questions Take notes	55

Follow up Lesson Plan

In the next period, students are encouraged to do these activities by themselves. A volunteer is to give commands to the class members and check if they understand the commands (regarding lesson plan A). After that the teacher is to tell the whole class to try to come up with some questions in respect to previous activities. Any kind of question will be welcomed. This is to eliminate any cultural ambiguities which are likely to get in the way of students' clear understanding of foreign culture or foreign language. An example of cultural ambiguity would be the following: we Japanese do not "fold" our arms. We would "cross" them, as we do our legs, and students may be curious about this linguistic difference (cf. 1 of material#3). The teacher could also tell the students what book the commands were excerpted from if students get interested in the contents.

A follow up lesson for lesson plan B should be done this way. The teacher encourage students to read a chapter of a certain grammar book which deals with past perfect tense in order to have them get accustomed with the tense that does not exist in the Japanese language. Here, I dare say that Japanese students need to struggle with grammatical theories before they actually practice them orally. Because we do not have any background in realizing our thoughts using past perfect tense students might get into a problem that merely mimicking the sounds without knowing what they are doing. According to Lenneberg (1967), one cannot acquire any language beside our own only by ear after he/she has passed the critical period. The only way they can take is a combination of diligent work with a grammar book and conversation practice in a natural setting. My plan employs this method and can meet both requirement; grammar and oral practice.

Conclusion

In this lesson plan, out of four basic language skills the listening skill is emphasized. I believe that second language learning should follow the trace of first language acquisition in terms of sequence. At seventeen, one may already be too old to start learning a language by ear. However, one is still young enough to have the capability to learn easier than an adult.

When students are doing TPR, perhaps they feel foolish. Students in puberty are prone to feel insulted. Teachers should be sensitive not to hurt their fragile self-identity. That is why I think teachers should act together with their students so as not to alienate the students. If the teacher realize that a student cannot keep up with the class, the teacher could give the written commands to the student.

The purpose of the dictation is to imprint the visual image of new words on the students' mind like children memorizing the features of letter by seeing them over and over again. In this point, Hasumi (1977) points out that Japanese students are outstanding in spelling foreign words referring his wife's experience in her French class. Her students showed "magic" to her in doing "information gap game". Most of the students used the "magic" of waving their fingers to recall the spelling of the given words. They were simply writing the words in the air. This clearly shows that the way by which we learn how to spell foreign words; write and see them repetitively (frequently many hundred times) is effective to the extent to be seen as a magic. Though westerners may judge repetitive drill practice as a weakness of Japanese English education, I think we should keep this tradition.

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Material #1

Object: To train listening comprehension skill. Japanese tend to make mistakes in answering negative question such as "Don't you smoke?"

- 1 Are you in a classroom now?
- 2 Is today Friday?

- 3 Am I speaking Spanish?
- 4 Do you eat dinner in the cafeteria?
- 5 Do you have to study English?
- 6 Are you going back to the States after you graduate?
- 7 Have you ever been to Hokkaido?
- 8 Do you like snakes?
- 9 Do you smoke?
- 10 You don't smoke, right?
- 11 You are not old enough to apply for colleges, are you?
- 12 Do you mind if I open the window?
- 13 Are you sure?
- 14 You don't have to get up at seven o'clock in the morning, do you? Use two cards.
- 15 You have to eat your breakfast as early as you can, don't you? Use two cards.

Material #2

yes

no

I have to

I don't have to

Material #3

- 1 Fold your arms.
- 2 Cross your legs.
- 3 Stand up.
- 4 Stand on your left leg.
- 5 Walk backwards.
- 6 Point to the door.
- 7 Close your eyes. Open your eyes.
- 8 Go back to your seat.
- 9 Put your hand on your head.
- 10 Put your hand on your nose.
- 11 Put your hand on your friend's shoulder.
- 12 Put your hand on your friend's nose.
- 13 That's it (see how they react).

Material #4

- 1 Examine one key out of a bunch of keys in a ring.
- 2 Put it into a keyhole.
- 3 Unlock the door.
- 4 Grab the doorknob.
- 5 Turn it to the right.
- 6 Push the door slowly.
- 7 Open the door a little.
- 8 Sneak into a room.
- 9 Look around if there is somebody inside.
- 10 Walk straight to a desk.
- 11 Open one of the drawers.
- 12 Pull out a sheet of paper.
- 13 Read it quickly.
- 14 Put your right hand into a pocket of your jacket.
- 15 Take out a small camera.
- 16 Take a picture of the paper.
- 17 Put the camera into the pocket.
- 18 Put the paper back in its place.
- 19 Sneak out the room.
- 20 Close the door.
- 21 Lock the door.
- 22 Walk away.

Who do you think this person is?

Material #5

- 1 Take out your notebook or a piece of paper.
- 2 Write these phrases down.
- 3 Examine one key.
- 4 A bunch of keys.
- 5 Unlock the door.
- 6 Grab the doorknob.
- 7 Sneak into the room.
- 8 Put the paper back in its place.
- 9 When you finish writing, sit upright.

These phrases are rare to see in textbooks used in Japan.

Material #6

Looking Into a Mirror Game:

The object of this game is to make students practice few basic patterns of English frequently used in a daily life. Students are paired up and one of them are told to act as if he/she is doing something simple such as combing her hair or munching potato chips. The other is to imitate that action describing what his/her partner is doing, then they have to say to their partners what they have done using present perfect tense. An example should be the following.

Student A: Moving her hand at her mouth as if she is brushing her teeth.

Student B: You are having lunch of chinese noodles?

S. A: No!

S. B: Oh, you are brushing your teeth, right?

S. A: Bingo!

S. B: O. K. You've just brushed your teeth.